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SUBJECT: TFH01: WHA ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHANNON'S MEETING  
WITH HONDURAN CIVIL SOCIETY FIGURES

REF: A. TEGUCIGALPA 1103

1B. TEGUCIGALPA 1067

1C. TEGUCIGALPA 989

11. (SBU) Summary: WHA Assistant Secretary Thomas A. Shannon met with two separate groups of civil society representatives on October 29 to discuss the status of the Guaymuras talks, the urgent need to reach a negotiated accord, and the readiness of the USG to support the elections process if an accord could be reached. At the first meeting, members of the Zelaya cabinet, anti-coup Members of Congress and anti-coup "resistance" organizers described their opposition to the coup as a peaceful movement and accused the de facto regime of creating an environment that was antithetical to free and fair elections. They agreed an accord was urgently needed. In the second meeting, representatives of the anti-Zelaya civil society elements expressed at least tacit support for signing an accord, because they felt it would shift the national focus from the political crisis to economic and social development. The group expressed the need for a plan for Honduras to recover from the social and economic damage brought about by the crisis. End summary.

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Zelaya Cabinet and Anti-coup Figures  
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12. (SBU) The Ambassador hosted a meeting for Assistant Secretary Shannon and National Security Council Senior Director for Western Hemisphere Affairs Daniel Restrepo with members of the Zelaya government and other prominent anti-coup figures on October 29. Participants were: Liberal Party (LP) congressman and former Zelaya Defense Minister Edmundo Orellana, Vice Foreign Ministers Eduardo Rosales Ramirez, Beatriz Valle and Patricia Licona de Reina, Democratic Unification (UD) congressman Marvin Ponce, and anti-coup resistance leader Rafael Alegria. Canadian Ambassador to Honduras Neil Reeder, who is resident in San Jose, and ranking resident Canadian diplomat Daniel Arsenault also participated in the meeting.

13. (SBU) The Ambassador opened by explaining that the purpose of A/S Shannon's visit was to encourage all sides to conclude an agreement to restore constitutional and democratic order in Honduras. The Ambassador said that the delegation's meetings had been intense and productive, and that the delegation was eager to hear from the group. A/S Shannon noted that the parties were on the verge of an accord, and

that the United States was very interested in a successful resolution soon. He added that the United States was ready to provide robust support for elections if an accord could be reached, but conversely, if no accord was reached before elections, the United States position was that successful elections would be difficult to carry out and difficult to recognize as legitimate. The Assistant Secretary acknowledged that the political crisis was very dramatic, and there were strong feelings on both sides of the conflict.

¶4. (SBU) Rosales noted that the crisis was both political and social, and that the reality of the conflict was very different from what the de facto regime was portraying. He said the regime was placing many restrictions on freedom of expression and opinion. Ponce added that opponents of the coup have been required to request permission from the de facto authorities to be able to march and protest, and do not always receive it. He said these were historic times, when a peaceful resistance movement was standing up to aggression by security forces which defend an undemocratic regime. He told the Assistant Secretary that the grassroots movement had stood its ground for four months despite detentions and torture at the hands of the security forces. Ponce stressed that it was the Congress who committed a coup -- a political (versus military) coup, but a coup nonetheless.

¶5. (SBU) Orellana stated that the opponents of the coup fully supported a transparent process to reach a resolution of the crisis, which he characterized as arising out of two illegal acts: first the forcible removal of President Zelaya from the country, then his deposal from office by the Congress. Orellana noted that while both sides were on the verge of

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reaching a political solution, much work would remain to heal the social wounds brought on by the crisis.

¶6. (SBU) Orellana then highlighted the sense of urgency to resolve the crisis noting there were almost 300 congressional candidates and 200 municipal candidates who were prepared to renounce their candidacies if no accord were reached by November 1. He said if this many candidates were to drop out, the validity of the elections would be placed in serious doubt. Orellana expressed the anti-coup movement's desire for a rapid resolution and subsequently a strong international observer mission for the elections. (Note: No candidates have yet renounced.)

¶7. (SBU) Licona stated that although the crisis was caused by Hondurans and was an internal conflict between Hondurans, they welcomed international support to resolve it. She said elections held without an accord beforehand would be a legitimization of the coup, because the regime had placed so many restrictions on freedoms necessary to hold elections. Licona noted that despite repealing a decree that had placed limits on gatherings of more than 20 people, forbade any public criticism of the regime and ordered the closure of media outlets who encouraged resistance to the regime, many of the restrictions remained in force (See Reftels B and C). She then presented a document she claimed had been sent out by the Armed Forces to all mayors in the country, requesting the names and contact information of local resistance leaders, as well as leaders of the (pro-regime) Civic and Democratic Union movement. (Note: On October 29, an Armed Forces spokesman gave a radio interview denying the document had been issued by the Armed Forces, and telling any mayors receiving the document to disregard it. End note)

¶8. (SBU) Valle stated President Zelaya had shown his willingness to resolve the political crisis. She stressed the solution would be a political one and not a legal one as de facto leader Micheletti had suggested. Valle also observed that the U.S. position had appeared to evolve and soften from its original, unequivocal demand for immediate restoration of President Zelaya to support for negotiation with the de facto regime to reach a solution without

preconditions.

¶19. (SBU) Resistance leader Rafael Alegria explained that the resistance movement, which was actually four different groups working together, had begun the day following the coup. He stressed its peaceful goals and approach, despite aggressive tactics to suppress it by the regime through the police, military and other intimidation tactics. Alegria noted that same day, six demonstrators had been injured by security forces and hospitalized. (Note: Post was able to confirm this claim with police contacts later in the day. End note.)

Alegria stated that the movement's goal was restoration of the constitutional order, which he defined as the restoration of President Zelaya to power. Alegria said that because all the national powers supported the coup, none of them was now legitimate. Alegria concluded that without restoration of the constitutional order, elections were illegitimate.

Alegria asked A/S Shannon what the U.S. position would be if an agreement were signed, the restitution question went to Congress and then languished there until after elections.

¶10. (SBU) A/S Shannon reiterated the U.S. position that the need to sign an accord was urgent, noting that any further delays would signify a lack of good faith to reach an agreement, and that the United States would have to consider the negotiation process a failure. He stressed also that the United States did not see a way for legitimate elections to take place in the absence of an agreement. However, he noted, the solution to the crisis will be a political one, and therefore it required negotiation. Restrepo said that the United States would have to deal with the Honduran situation whether there was a resolution of the crisis or not, and that the chief U.S. concern would be to promote progress toward democratic principles and institutions.

¶11. (SBU) Reeder noted that the issue of constitutional order was not about a person, but about the constitutional institutions, and eventually about a peaceful transfer of

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power to a government selected by the Honduran people. He stressed that a deal was on the table, but time was running out because legitimate elections under the current regime appeared very unlikely.

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Anti-Zelaya Civil Society  
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¶12. (SBU) Following the meeting with the Zelaya cabinet and supporters, the Ambassador hosted a similar meeting for the delegation with representatives of anti-Zelaya civil society groups. Guests were: Armida Villeda de Lopez Contreras of the Civic Democratic Union (UCD), Juan F. Ferrera, also UCD and former head of the National Anti-corruption Council, Ines de Zablah of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Tegucigalpa (CCIT), Adolfo "Fito" Facusse, head of the National Association of Industrialists (ANDI), and Epaminondas Marinakys of the Honduras National Chamber of Tourism.

¶13. (SBU) The meeting began with the USG representatives explaining the purpose of their visit and reminding the attendees that if an accord was signed, the international community and the USG could begin to provide support for the upcoming elections. Facusse retorted that it would not be possible to accomplish their task in such a short amount of time since Congress was in recess, to which Villeda rebutted that various members of Congress told the UCD that they were on "stand-by" to go to Congress if the accord was signed.

¶14. (SBU) Villeda continued that the UCD supported a resolution that fell within the Honduran constitution and legal system, but did not want the international community to pressure Honduras to reform its constitution. She said that their goals were to protect the electoral process, return to

normalcy, and shift the focus to social development. A/S Shannon responded that the United States agreed that the conflict over Zelaya's proposed constitutional assembly was a tragedy, but pointed out that the best option for promoting social development was for both sides to sign the accord. A/S Shannon emphasized the urgency of reaching a solution, saying that his delegation would leave on October 30 and that the OAS delegation would also leave soon if no agreement was signed. De Zablah expressed the CCIT's support for the talks and said they saw a signed agreement as the way to shift the focus towards economic development and job creation. A/S Shannon agreed, saying that the political crisis had an impact on the Honduran economy.

¶15. (SBU) Facusse shifted the conversation, asking what guarantees the USG would provide to ensure that President Zelaya would not resume the campaigns he pursued before June 28. A/S Shannon responded that the USG had made many attempts over the course of several months to get Micheletti to tell the USG what actions it could take to ensure the constitutional transfer of power on January 27, 2010, but that Micheletti had not provided any specific requests. Facusse responded that Zelaya was not the problem, rather "his owner - Chavez" was the problem.

¶16. (SBU) Ferrera stated that Honduras would need a special plan to recuperate from the crisis. He cited the three biggest problems as poverty, corruption and insecurity, noting that each one exacerbated the other, similar to a vicious circle. Ferrera continued that the business community wanted to revamp the now dormant development and job creation programs. Villeda added that the brunt of economic impact of the June 28 coup was borne by the poor. She said that they would welcome international assistance, even suggesting naming it the "Clinton Plan," and said they were ready to provide suggestions. She said that her organization was planning to sign a "social pact" with the presidential candidates on November 3 (septel).

¶17. (SBU) A/S Shannon concluded the meeting by telling the participants that Honduras could serve as an example to other countries in the region where democracy was weak or in danger. He said that if the accord was signed, it would demonstrate that one cannot simply get rid of a leader

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unconstitutionally. A/S Shannon reiterated that it was possible to resolve the crisis peacefully and democratically. Furthermore, he recognized that Honduras had many more problems besides the political crisis and that although signing an agreement would not resolve all those problems, it was a necessary first step.

¶18. Assistant Secretary Shannon cleared this cable.  
LLORENS